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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Center for Minority and Women's Studies at the State University of New York (SUNY) College at Cortland. Changing demographics combined with a resurgent racism and continuing inequality for women pose significant challenges to higher education. The SUNY College at Cortland is meeting these challenges through the inauguration of a comprehensive set of new initiatives to transform the curriculum, support faculty development, add richness and diversity to the cultural life of the college community, improve recruitment and retention of minority and women faculty and minority students, and confront aspects of campus life which tend to produce an inhospitable climate for minorities and women. The Center coordinates large numbers of activities, such as developing new minors in Womens Studies, Hispanic Studies, and Jewish Studies, requiring that all students take a course dealing with issues of prejudice and discrimination, and showcasing the talents and accomplishments of many minority and women artists, scholars, and community and political leaders. The SUNY College at Cortland has mobilized its resources to present a unified and innovative approach to curriculum development, faculty development, the creation of a multi-cultural environment, and meeting the needs of women and minority students and faculty. (SM)

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CENTER FOR MINORITY AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

ABSTRACT

Center for Minority and Women's Studies
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Changing demographics combined with a resurgent racism and continuing inequality for women pose significant challenges to higher education. The State University College at Cortland, New York is meeting these challenges through the inauguration of a comprehensive, coordinated set of new initiatives to transform the curriculum, support faculty development, add richness and diversity to the cultural life of the college community, improve the recruitment and retention of minority and women faculty and minority students, and confront aspects of campus life which tend to produce an inhospitable climate for minorities and women.

INTRODUCTION

The present document contains a description of a comprehensive set of programs and strategies initiated at the State University College at Cortland, New York for the purpose of addressing problems of prejudice and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation or sexual orientation. This set of programs and strategies is housed in the recently established Center for Minority and Women's Studies. This Center is responsible for coordinating a large number of activities, including curriculum development, cultural and intellectual events, faculty development, improving the recruitment and retention of minority and women faculty and minority students, and confronting aspects of the campus climate that can sometimes become uncomfortable for minority and women students, faculty and staff. Each of these activities is described in detail below.

CENTER FOR MINORITY AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

BACKGROUND

In 1983 the SUNY system was confronted with severe budget reductions. As in many other institutions, the Black Studies Program at the College at Cortland was under scrutiny as a possible source of budgetary savings. President James M. Clark asked John C. Stockwell, Dean of Arts and Sciences, to head a task force to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the College's minority studies programs. After an extensive review, the task force reported back to the campus community with an unusual set of recommendations. They argued persuasively that our students, our faculty, and our mission as a liberal arts college all required a flourishing set of Minority and Women's Studies programs and that, rather than targeting them for retrenchment, these programs should be dramatically expanded and enriched.

In September, 1985 then-Acting President Charles O. Warren accepted the task force's major recommendations and established a new Center for Minority and Women's Studies. The Center was charged with curriculum development, the creation of several new minors in Minority and Women's Studies areas, faculty development, cultural events programming, and recruitment and retention of minority students. Warren named William C. Russell, Assistant Dean of Arts and Sciences, as Coordinator of the Center and appointed a 33-member Minority and Women's Studies Council to undertake the work of the Center.

With the inception of this group, a very substantial segment of the campus community began to direct its energies to issues of concern to minority and women students, faculty, and staff. For the first time, permanent structures were instituted which could undertake a comprehensive, coordinated approach to questions of vital concern to the College. The results have already been impressive and are establishing the State University College at Cortland as an innovative leader in the SUNY system and, indeed, nation-wide.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

As its first responsibility, the Minority and Women's Studies Council developed a set of by-laws that would formalize its governance structure and define its overall agenda (see Appendix A). Committees were established which would address specific aspects of that agenda.

A major and immediate concern involved curriculum development, an effort which proceeded on two fronts. First, new minors had

to be developed in Women's Studies, Hispanic Studies and Jewish Studies. (A major and a minor in Black Studies already existed as a part of the Black Studies Program.) A critical underlying assumption in this process was that these groups share a common, though not identical, experience of oppression and that it is important to recognize and stress this commonality. In this sense, these programs represent the second wave of scholarship in these areas, one which builds on the traditions established in the late 60's and early 70's, but which now consciously insists that Women's Studies address the problems facing women of color and that ethnic studies more seriously address women's issues.

At this point in time, the Women's Studies minor is in place, and the minor proposals for the Jewish Studies and Hispanic Studies have been submitted for approval.

As a second approach to curriculum development, the Center initiated a new requirement that <u>all</u> students take a course dealing with issues of prejudice and discrimination as part of their General Education (core curriculum). Courses in this category address racism, sexism, anti-semitism, and other forms of bias. As seen in the criteria included in Appendix B, the primary focus is on contemporary American society, but historical instances and examples of prejudice and discrimination in other cultures are also examined. Students consider these issues as both a societal problem and as a problem in their own lives.

The General Education requirement was implemented in the Fall, 1988 Semester, and faculty from many different departments across campus are working on courses for this category. At the present time, courses are offered in the Psychology, Philosophy, Geography and Sociology/Anthropology departments, and one interdisciplinary course has been approved. To our knowledge, the College at Cortland is one of only three campuses in the entire nation to endorse such a requirement for all students. In December of 1988, we were asked by the Middle States Association of Colleges to give a presentation on this requirement as a part of their annual conference's session on curriculum reform (see Appendix C).

Clearly, all of the curriculum development outlined above could not have been undertaken without a concomitant program of faculty development. The College at Cortland took an important first step in August, 1984 when 150 faculty took precious vacation time to attend a day-long faculty forum on "Combatting Racism and Sexism."

In June, 1986 a dozen faculty and staff participated in an intensive, two-week workshop entitled "Exploring Gender, Race, and Class." Organized and facilitated by Professors Jane Rhodes (Communication Studies) and Kathryn Russell (Philosophy), the workshop featured leading scholars in Black and Women's Studies

as guest lecturers, plus panel discussions on pedagogy and curriculum development and a tremendous amount of reading and dialogue. Here again, the themes of the workshop revolved around the interconnections among gender, race, and class as participants looked in depth at some of the exciting scholarship and pedagogical techniques current across several disciplines. Many sessions of the workshop were open to the community; several were attended by upwards of 30 faculty, staff, and students. Guest lectures and panels were videotaped for the benefit of those who could not attend. Many of the participants described the workshop as one of the most stimulating personal and intellectual events in recent memory; many of them have subsequently taken the lead in developing new curricula and in presenting lunchtime faculty seminars.

Since that time, the Center's General Education Committee and Faculty Development Committee have regularly sponsored workshop activities in order to stimulate course development and/or revision. In the spring of 1988, Paula Rothenberg and Lesley Agard-Jones of William Paterson College conducted a two-day workshop for faculty interested in offering courses in the Prejudice and Discrimination General Education category. In May of 1989, Rothenberg will return to conduct another workshop, this time for faculty who desire to incorporate ideas about racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination into their courses across the curriculum. This latter activity represents an effort on the part of the Center to have these themes infused into the College curriculum generally, as opposed to having them discussed only in the special General Education category.

An important component of the Center for Minority and Women's Studies has been in the area of cultural events. The Center, in conjunction with other campus groups, has worked hard to showcase the talents and accomplishments of a broad array of minority and women artists, scholars, and community and political leaders over the past four years. Cesar Chavez, Sonia Sanchez, Vincent Harding, Barbara Smith, Manning Marable, Samuel Proctor, Vernon Bellacourt, Judy Gorman-Jacobs, Beryll Banfield, Janet Kaufman, Darlene Clark Hine, James Stewart, Carol Zemel, William Finnegan, Nelson Johnson, Kate Clinton, Iris Young, Karima Amin, Claribel Alegria, and Bernice Johnson Reagon have all enriched our community with their visits. When we add to them the many other highly talented (though lesser known) individuals we have brought to campus, the list doubles. No student will be able to graduate from the College at Cortland without a rich appreciation of the important cultural and intellectual contributions of women and people of color.

Our new curricula, faculty development, and cultural events are, of course, directed toward meeting the needs of all of our students and the larger college community. The College at Cortland has also focused, however, on the specific needs of

minority and women students and is now addressing problems which are unique to them.

As one activity, the Center, along with the Admissions Office and the Educational Opportunities Program, has been active in support of recruitment and retention of minority students. The College hired a new minority student recruiter in 1986 who has been aggressive about increasing the numbers of black and hispanic students enrolled at the College at Cortland. A recent survey of faculty brought an overwhelmingly positive response indicating their willingness to participate in minority student recruitment efforts. Large numbers of faculty said they were willing to make phone calls, write letters, make recruitment trips, meet with prospective students and open their classes to visitors. Several groups of minority high school students are brought to campus for two days each spring, and newly admitted freshmen participate in special pre-enrollment summer orientation programs. Plans are underway to involve minority alumni in student recruitment as well. The Center also was central in the inauguration of a minority student support office, the Student Voice. This office is open every day, staffed primarily by Center members, to provide personal, academic, and even emergency financial assistance to black and hispanic students when they need it.

As part of its attempt to be responsive to students' problems, the Center has worked increasingly with the College's Vice President for Student Affairs, Linda Kuk. As examples, Center members helped in the modification of the student handbook and judicial code so that harassment based on race, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation or sexual orientation is viewed as a serious and punishable offense. In addition, Center members helped plan and participate in a Student Leadership Conference on prejudice and discrimination, served as panel members and workshop facilitators for resident assistant training, and conducted residence hall programs. This past February, the Center co-sponsored and helped plan a Leadership Workshop that was targeted specifically towards black and hispanic students. Finally, this year a standing committee on Lesbian and Gay Concerns was added to the Center, partially in response to the problems students in these groups were facing on campus. Clearly, these activities reflect a strong commitment on the part of the Center to help provide a campus climate that is comfortable for all students.

Staffing for the Center's activities is accomplished for the most part through dedicated volunteer effort, in active coalition with other campus constituencies. At the present time, more than 60 faculty, staff and students actively work with the Center, representing nearly every academic department, student support area, and relevant student organization on campus. A quarter of an administrative line provides the only staff support, and a part-time secretary is shared with another program. The Center

receives an annual allocation from the College of $3400 for supplies and expenses and $1000 for hiring temporary employees. A number of in-house grants have been received to help with expenses, and in most cases the Center combines its resources with those from other on-campus groups in sponsoring activities and events.

RESULTS

Many of the programs described above are relatively new since the Center has only been in existence for four years. Thus, a long-term assessment of their success has not been undertaken.

The Black Studies, Hispanic Studies, Jewish Studies and Women's Studies committees are responsible for evaluating the courses that make up their respective major and/or minor programs. Similarly, the General Education Committee assesses classes that are included in the College's General Education category on Prejudice and Discrimination. These evaluations entail examination of course materials, student input, peer review, and where available, measures of attitude change in students who have taken these courses. The Admissions Office can provide data to demonstrate the substantial increase in black and hispanic student enrollments over the past two years.

The Student Voice Office logs the number of students who come in as well as the nature of any problems they report to the staff. Traffic was slow at first (typical of any new service) but has been picking up steadily. Over time, the Student Voice Office records will provide a basis for assessing the nature and extent of minority student problems and the effectiveness of attempts to help resolve them.

CONCLUSION

We live in a state where over 30% of the population are minorities and in a nation increasingly concerned with a resurgent racism and continuing inequality for women. Faced with the challenges posed by this situation, the State University College at Cortland has mobilized its resources. We believe that our unified, innovative approach to curriculum development, to faculty development, to the creation of a multi-cultural environment, and to meeting the needs of women and minority students and faculty makes us a model for higher education.